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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (6/20): THE TRUCE - WHAT'S NEXT?
U.N TROOPS IN GAZA; A WEST BANK TRUCE?

Main Stories:

Dailies lead with news on the first day of a truce between Hamas and Israel. Al-Ayyam reports, "the truce survived its first day. Israeli tanks stand idle on the Gaza borders." The paper runs photos of Israeli soldiers and members of the Hamas Executive Forces relaxing on their respective sides of the Gaza line. All dailies express caution in their predictions of how long the truce will last. The dailies highlight that if the truce lasts long enough, the deployment of U.N. forces in Gaza may be possible. The papers quote Israeli Premier Olmert stating that the truce is the last chance for Hamas to avoid an Israeli military attack on the Gaza Strip. All dailies report that one Palestinian fighter was killed and two injured in an Israeli air strike that took place just before the start of the ceasefire.

Coverage also highlights official Palestinian reaction to the Hamas/Israel truce. Palestinian Prime Minister Fayyad considers the truce to be a, "very important step towards improving the humanitarian situation in Gaza," according to the dailies. Fayyad also criticizes, "ongoing settlement activities in the West Bank," and calls for the truce to be expanded to the West Bank. Related reports in all papers highlight that Palestinian President Abbas welcomed the truce.

All dailies express outrage over the burning by Israeli settlers of Palestinian olive trees and wheat fields near the West Bank city of Nablus on June 19. Front page photos in all papers show the burning landscape. Jamal Al Muhaysin, Governor of Nablus, comments that settlers are, "like a cancer in the West Bank," and alerted press that Israeli Defense Forces denied access to civil defense firemen, causing the fire to spread.

All dailies report that Hamas and Israel will begin indirect negotiations on June 24 regarding a prisoners' exchange agreement that Israeli Defense Minister Barak says will require Israel to make, "difficult decisions." In related coverage, the dailies highlight outrage expressed by the father of captured Israeli soldier Shalit. The father accuses Israeli Premier Olmert and Israeli officials of having, 'forsaken' his son who has been held captive in Gaza since June 2006.

Ongoing meetings between Fatah and Hamas officials aimed at reconciliation attract front page coverage in the dailies. The dailies report that a Palestinian presidential delegation met with national activists including governors, mayors, community and religious leaders in an attempt to boost reconciliation efforts. However, the dailies also highlight disappointment by Hamas leader Haniyyah over the delegation's failure to meet with him and other members of his Hamas "government" as previously planned. Haniyyah described the failure as, "irresponsible behavior" by the Fatah leaders and indicates that reconciliation is not their true objective.

Palestinian President Abbas' June 19 meeting with Yemeni President Salih is front page news. Abbas briefed Salih on current developments in the Palestinian Territory and the truce agreement in the Gaza Strip, papers note. Abbas also briefed Salih on the results of his recent visit to the United States and his meeting with Israeli Premier Olmert and progress on the peace process, papers continue.

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BLOCK QUOTES:

1. Al-Quds prints its daily editorial entitled, "What comes next, after the first day of the truce! (6/20): "Finally, a truce was agreed upon and it has cautiously entered its first day. Everyone is watching, with many differing expectations. Hamas officials, one after the other, confirm their commitment to the truce and all its details. They also describe it as a victory for the Palestinian people. On the Israeli side, they assure, with great caution, their commitment to the truce while they continue preparations for a comprehensive military operation [into Gaza should the truce fail]... in any case, the truce is a positive and needed step, and it is one thing that the Palestinian Authority has always called for. It was the first supporter of it and called upon all parties to commit to it. The positive position of the Palestinian Authority regarding the truce is [clear]. But there are many questions... [that remain] after the first day of the truce. The big question is how long the truce will last, for one month or two? Or will it be on-going and develop into something bigger than merely a truce between Hamas and Israel? The second big question is what influence the truce will have on the national Palestinian dialogue that President Abbas has called for. Is it going to make Hamas more extreme in terms of its demands, or will it become a meeting point for all Palestinian parties? The coming days will provide some of the answers. Everyone is watching and hoping that all of this will result in real and positive outcomes."

2. Independent Al-Ayyam carries an op-ed by columnist Muhammad Yaghi entitled, "The implications of the cease-fire in Gaza" (6/20): "Hamas is trying to maintain its grip on Gaza through the accomplishment of the truce. It is a truce that Hamas sees as a way to lift the siege, while Israel sees it as a way to somewhat ease restrictions on fuel and goods, and on [people's] movement through some of the crossings... This agreement seems to have further implications. Let us assume that it... was also agreed upon by all other Palestinian parties [in Gaza]; then Hamas should honor its commitment to the truce, if the Israelis [do]... and prevent small and bigger groups... from breaking it. In this way,...it may even provide a positive opening for the development of a new and real relationship between Fatah and Hamas that can end internal Palestinian division and unite the two parts of the nation."

WALLES